DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 099 904 CS 500 876

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TITLE Effective Use of Communication Group Sessions on Speech and Listening Intelligibility at Milwaukee Area Technical College.
PUB DATE 74
NOTE 10p.
JOURNAL CIT Journal of the Wisconsin Communication Association; v4 n2 p84-90 Spring 1974

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.75 HC-$1.50 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS Class Management; *Class Organization; *Classroom Communication; College Instruction; College Students; Communication (Thought Transfer); Educational Research; Higher Education; *Listening Skills; Peer Relationship; *Speech Skills
IDENTIFIERS Milwaukee; Wisconsin

ABSTRACT

A study was conducted at Milwaukee Area Technical College to determine if a relationship could be established between improvement in speaking and listening intelligibility and the deliberate structuring of a semiformal atmosphere in communication classes. Students with ACT composite scores below 13 were offered courses specially designed to remedy their linguistic and mathematical problems. In the fall semesters of 1971-72 and 1972-73, students in two of these communication skills sections were tested with a Speech and Listening Intelligibility exam. The two control groups engaged in formal classroom activities, while the experimental groups met in an informal class setting where there was an opportunity for them to become acquainted with one another. In the posttesting situation, using the same exam, the experimental group students spoke clearly and with confidence. They seemed to have a rapport with one another that was not evident in the control group. In general, experimental group students exhibited a marked increase in both listening and speaking scores during the semester, while control group students exhibited a decrease in scores. Statistical data are included. (TO)

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Journal of the Wisconsin Communication Association

Official Journal of the Wisconsin Communication Association

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Volume IV Number 2 Spring, 1974

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Mariann Maris

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EFFECTIVE USE OF COMMUNICATIONS GROUP SESSIONS ON SPEECH AND LISTENING INTELLIGIBILITY AT MILWAUKEE AREA TECHNICAL COLLEGE

Mariann Maris

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Background

A "Crossover" Communication Skills I program was initiated at Milwaukee Area Technical College for the first time in the first semester of the 1971-72 school year. Students are placed in the Crossover courses if their composite score on the ACT is lower than thirteen. Courses offered to these students are English (Communication Skills), Reading, Speech, Mathematics, or Psychology. All the courses are designed to remedy certain linguistic and mathematical problems which resulted in a low ACT score.[1] Students who successfully complete the courses in the Crossover program can enroll in "non-Crossover" or non-remedial programs at M.A.T.C. if they wish to return for another semester. They receive full credit for their Crossover program courses if they pass the course with a "C" or higher.

Scope

In the first semester of the 1971-72 school year and again in the first semester of the 1972-73 school year, two Communication Skills I sections were tested with a Speech and Listening Intelligibility Examination, which are presented in two forms, A and B. Form B was administered in September, 1971 and in September, 1972; Form A in early January, 1972 and 1973. The test, which measures the accuracy of one's speaking and listening abilities, was designed by Terrence Adams, Dean of M.A.T.C. College of the Air. The nonpublished test has been the object of experimentation and the test when conducted by Mr. Adams at M.A.T.C. has proven to be a useful tool to reliably measure a student's ability to exhibit fundamental speaking and listening skills. A student must be able to discriminate between different sounds in order to acquire whatever information an instructor communicates orally in the classroom. This test measures the listener's ability to differentiate "like" sounds. If a person does not speak clearly to his teachers or fellow students, he is not communicating effectively what he knows because of the way he talks. The failure to speak clearly enough to elicit a desired response in the listener could be a source of academic and personal frustration. A total of fifty students in four groups took the pre- and post- forms of the Speech Intelligibility and Listening Intelligibility test over a two-year period. For the time being, there is no further experimentation with testing and groups in session due to the assignment of the instructor to non-Crossover Communication Skills courses.

The Test

A sample test of Form A and Form B appear on the next two pages.

Mariann Maris (M.A. English, Marquette University, 1968) is an instructor of Communication Skills at the Milwaukee Area Technical College. She notes that special credit for this paper are due to the cooperation of Dr. Marvin Ketterling, Counselling Center, M.A.T.C., and Mr. Terrence Adams who authored the Speech and Listening Intelligibility Test and permitted its usage.

Milwaukee Area Technical College
Junior College Division
Speech Department

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SPEECH INTELLIGIBILITY TEST - FORM A

ANSWER SHEET

1. form
2. warm
3. swarm
4. storm

1. air force
2. airport
3. air corps
4. airborne

1. group
2. troop
3. coupe
4. fruit

1. reason
2. region
3. legion
4. legend

1. stretch
2. threat
3. dread
4. bread

1. certain
2. pertain
3. person
4. curtain

1. raid
2. rate
3. range
4. rage

1. uncle
2. buckle
3. knuckle
4. suckle

1. campus
2. canvas
3. pamphlet
4. panther

1. spark
2. park
3. dark
4. bark

1. quicker
2. flicker
3. slicker
4. liquor

1. wonder
2. blunder
3. thunder
4. sponsor

1. hear
2. steer
3. near
4. deer

1. export
2. extort
3. expert
4. escort

1. fitting
2. pretty
3. city
4. sitting

1. dread
2. dress
3. rest
4. red

1. court
2. fort
3. port
4. quart

1. tassel
2. tackle
3. cattle
4. pistol

1. beef
2. beast
3. beat
4. beam

1. corn
2. torn
3. horn
4. born

1. guard
2. hearten
3. garden
4. bargain

1. file
2. panel
3. funnel
4. final

1. owl
2. call
3. hall
4. all

1. screech
2. preach
3. reach
4. street

SPEAKER NO. 1._____

Milwaukee Area Technical College
Junior College Division
Speech Department

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SPEECH INTELLIGIBILITY TEST - FORM B

ANSWER SHEET

1. center	1. big	1. quit
2. tender	2. bag	2. twist
3. timber	3. tank	3. swift
4. fender	4. leg	4. whip
1. why	1. nothing	1. sharp
2. wide	2. shopping	2. shock
3. wise	3. message	3. short
4. wives	4. jumping	4. shark
1. vamp	1. full	1. occur
2. map	2. pull	2. absurd
3. mat	3. fold	3. observe
4. vat	4. cold	4. conserve
1. paste	1. left	1. compress
2. pace	2. list	2. contract
3. paid	3. lisp	3. contract
4. paint	4. lid	4. contrast
1. unheard	1. dusk	1. grope
2. concurred	2. dust	2. grove
3. converge	3. just	3. grow
4. conserve	4. judge	4. glow
1. grain	1. ugly	1. fade
2. grange	2. hungry	2. vague
3. range	3. country	3. made
4. train	4. concrete	4. spade
1. confine	1. boat	1. wife
2. design	2. boast	2. twice
3. assign	3. booth	3. quite
4. combine	4. both	4. white
1. naval	1. rate	1. discord
2. Mabel	2. grace	2. pasteboard
3. table	3. rake	3. discharge
4. able	4. race	4. discard

SPEAKER NO. 4. _____

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Methodology

The Control Groups, I and III, met with Dr. Marvin Ketterling, Counselling Center Director, in a Communications Group one day a week for eight weeks. The sessions began in the fourth week of the semester and continued through the twelfth week. Groups II and IV did not meet in a Communications Group. Three hours a week were spent in formal classroom activities. Group I did not take Mathematics as their elective. They were enrolled in Psychology. Group II took Mathematics and appeared to be more eager to acquire knowledge in the first weeks of the semester.[2] Group III could take either Mathematics or Psychology. The same was true for Group IV.

The Speech and Listening Intelligibility test consists of several pages of words listed in a series and divided into 24 categories with a list of four words in each category. The test is 10 pages long and each page has different words. (The samples seen on each of the last two pages constitute a single page each.) The students in each class are required to read, from a separate sheet, one of the terms in each grouping of words. Each student reads 24 words to the remainder of the class. Those students who are listening are required to circle the word they hear the speaker say. The total number of listeners is multiplied by the total number of correct answers (24) for each group. A speaker would be 100% effective if there were no incorrect words circled by any of the listeners. Each listener writes the name of each speaker at the bottom of each page of the Intelligibility test. The effectiveness of each listener is determined by the total number of correct answers he circles after listening to all of the speakers. When all of the members of the class have read a list of 24 words, the test is completed.

Each speaker approached the front of the room and faced the listeners in the groups used for this experiment. The pace at which he read the words from the list he was given, the way he enunciated and projected was left to his judgment. The words are "easy," usually single-syllable words so that students were not hampered by any kind of reading problem. Some speakers were immediately aware of the necessity of reading slowly and were able to pace themselves accordingly. Some allowance must be made for poor acoustics. Background noises do affect the speaker's ability to be heard and understood.

Results

The results of the tests are stated in statistical terms on the next two pages. The Control Groups Results are shown first; the Experimental Groups Results are shown second.

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Results

Speech and Listening Intelligibility Tests: Control Groups (I and III)

Name (abbreviated)	Listening Scores		Speaking Scores	
	Sept. 1971	Jan. 1972	Sept. 1971	Jan. 1972
N. Whi	69%	34%	69%	44%
G. Eri	70	17	76	44
M. Nay	53	9	53	15
J. Zap	45	28	45	34
M. Vel	60	41	60	50
J. Rho	no score	45	33	25
D. Jac	"	46	41	24
R. Sch	"	40	60	45
P. Woo	"	4	66	36

Name	Sept. 1972	Jan. 1973	Sept. 1972	Jan. 1973
A. All	no score	90%	56%	62%
R. Tol	71	88	65	77
R. Nyh	47	75	67	79
D. Bow	no score	81	64	79
D. Tir	56	80	23	69
J. B.	no score	71	51	85
R. Tow	no score	74	50	70
G. Ber	no score	67	48	58
D. Mor	45	68	66	92
G. Gsc	51	68	53	72
D. Sch	64	82	57	81
J. Tob	53	71	47	92
B. Joh	45	75	57	70
L. Pow	49	76	31	71
R. Gro	no score	64	37	72

Results

Speech and Listening Intelligibility Tests: Experimental Groups (II and IV)

Name	Listening Scores		Speaking Scores	
	Sept. 1971	Jan. 1972	Sept. 1971	Jan. 1972
C. Car	95%	89%	71%	89%
L. Gel	85	90	84	92
D. Bol	72	81	80	88
P. Bai	88	88	70	92
T. Zol	81	90	83	86
F. Gli	85	87	77	83
J. Bro	78	88	81	84
P. Hor	86	87	83	no score
E. Grk	83	90	82	92
L. Gle	75	87	no score	no score

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Name	Listening Scores		Speaking Scores	
	Sept. 1972	Jan. 1973	Sept. 1972	Jan. 1973
J. Ant	74%	86%	84%	87%
G. Mon	75	87	71	90
G. Day	no score	77	47	86
D. Goe	27	75	56	88
C. Gra	no score	87	no score	93
M. Ale	53	82	62	81
B. Tho	60	87	51	93
R. Fue	74	92	62	94
J. Dar	68	94	57	90
D. Gir	61	88	57	90
D. How	56	83	47	78
A. Tr	no score	87	37	79
D. Wah	67	89	49	89
L. Cat	66	90	68	80
J. Cen	43	84	63	89
K. Kun	35	85	no score	69

Discussion

The results of the pre- and post- tests are interesting, particularly from the first groups, I and II. Generally speaking, speech intelligibility and listening intelligibility improves over the course of a semester in college. Group II, the control group, did not improve; in fact, their speech intelligibility scores in January were lower than the results from Form B of the test which was given in September. The speech intelligibility of the experimental group, Group I, improved in all cases with the exception of one person. The experimental group was meeting with Dr. Marvin Ketterling in an informal class setting where there was an opportunity for them to become acquainted with one another. When they participated in the post-testing situation, they were cognizant of the way their fellow classmates "heard" them. They paced themselves. One of the students was a victim of cerebral palsy, so it took him a longer time to encircle the word the speaker was reading. The reader always waited for him to move to the next set of words. In general, they spoke clearly and with confidence. They seemed to have a rapport with one another that was not evident in the control group. The control group seemed in a hurry to complete the test and leave. They hurried through the list and many listeners did not bother to circle words at all.

Because the contrast between scores of students enrolled in Communication Groups for one of the three hours allotted for class time and those who were not in such groups was so marked, the experiment was repeated in the 1972-73 school year. The contrast there was not as great. There may be several reasons. The control group had the highest academic successes among those students assigned to Crossover. They did not take Mathematics unless they wanted to. Most of them were highly motivated. The experimental group had a lower academic high school average and their ACT scores were lower than the scores of the control group. The class met from 8:50 - 9:40 A.M. three days a week and many students in the experimental group found the hours somewhat undesirable. As can be seen from the second set of results, however, Group III's improvement is generally indicative of a greater increase in percentage between Form B and Form A of the test.

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The sharp contrast in scores between Groups I and II and the generally higher scores between Groups III and IV indicate the effectiveness of meeting informally, where many of the regular classroom pressures are not operative. The students who had participated in the Communications Groups with Dr. Ketterling were more sensitive about the way they spoke to their fellow classmates and, in turn, their colleagues were careful about the way the listened and responded to the speaker. They appeared more eager to perform to the best of their ability on the test and made an effort to please. The control groups were not as anxious to please when they were tested. They hurried their speaking at times and failed on occasion to establish eye contact with their audience. Many times they mumbled. The students encircling the words often gave up before a speaker finished. Since their willingness to participate fully was at a low point, particularly for Group II, the test results were lower.

It is interesting that the control group II was enrolled in a programmed course in mathematics. They were meeting daily frustration. Of the nine students in Control Group II only two passed the course. They expressed disillusionment and dissatisfaction with the course although many of them felt that they worked harder at the course than at any other course they had ever taken, and still they failed. Perhaps the failure in Mathematics affected their performance in Communication Skills I and that frustration was measured in the differences between pre- and post- scores on the Speech and Listening Intelligibility Test.

The differences between test scores are not as great between Groups II and III. For each group changes in the Crossover program at the beginning of the 1972-73 school year prevented students from encountering too many difficulties in their academic programs. Student tutors, for example, were provided to Crossover students only. The Mathematics course was limited in its requirements. The result was a more satisfied, optimistic group of students in both the control and experimental groups.

Conclusion

The intent of this paper is to use statistics in a manner which illustrates rather than proves a relationship between improvement in speaking and listening intelligibility and the deliberate structuring of a semi-formal atmosphere in Communications classes. The suggestion can be made that students learn more about listening and speaking clearly when they spend some of their time getting to know one another in a semi-formal Communications Group setting. On the junior college level it is possible for a student to finish a course in Communication Skills I without ever speaking in a public setting to the members of his class; yet the interaction between members of the same classes improved those skills most essential for effective learning — speaking and listening.

FOOTNOTES

1. It must be noted that low high school grade point averages are also used as a determinant for admission to the Crossover programs along with advice from high school guidance counselors.

2. Personal observation of the instructor.